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FORREST SAWYER: Suddenly it seems American military information is this nation's worst-kept secret. Authorities are now afraid that a key figure in the Walker spy case, Jerry Whitworth, gave away vital computer secrets to the Soviet Union. Now, Whitworth is a close friend of this man, John Walker, whose brother and son are also accused of spying.

And in Los Angeles, FBI agent Richard Miller went on trial yesterday, charged with selling counterespionage information to the Soviets.

Admiral Stansfield Turner served as Director of the CIA under President Carter, and he is now a consultant to CBS News. He joins us in our Washington Bureau.

Admiral Turner, I know it's fair to say at the outset that the principals in these cases have either not gone to trial or their trials have not been completed. So they are innocent until their guilt is established, or not established. So we'll begin there.

The government presumes that how much damage has been done in these cases?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Well, of course, the government, in the court, has to make the case that there's been damage, or they can't convict these people. I think that a lot of what we've seen in the media is not very important information, or was important information for a limited period of time.

What is most disturbing to me is that John Walker served in our single most important military force. That's our submar-

ines with ballistic missiles. That force stands between us and nuclear war more than any other military force. The fact that Walker served in the submarine force indicates he could have given out some information of considerable value.

Now, there are ways to compensate for that. He could not have made our submarines instantly vulnerable, but he could have added to the Soviet research program against our submarines. A little piece here, a little piece there is the kind of thing we don't want to give away.

SAWYER: Immediate damage, though, such damage as there may have been, giving away codes, those sorts of things, that has been patched, one would presume.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think by now we can assume that. I believe the Soviets got a lot of good information about what the Navy was doing back in the days when Whitworth was sending the code information, and John Walker was active also.

SAWYER: It's an interesting question how an individual could be involved in so sensitive an area for so long a time and not be detected.

ADMIRAL TURNER: There's no question that our counterintelligence wasn't detecting the fact that John Walker was spending more money than he had before. It is just a matter of alertness, and we haven't been that alert, I'm afraid, particularly here in the Navy. His superior should have watched and seen there were changes in his behavior.

A lot of this, of course, took place after he left the Navy, and that makes it much more difficult because you really have to spy on Americans to check on this kind of a spying activity. And we have a lot of understandable rules about the privacy of citizens in our country.

SAWYER: Well, Admiral, is that where we have to leave it? We say that we will have to spy on Americans in order to have effective counterespionage, therefore there's nothing we can do. Or is there a way to improve the thing?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, there's lots of things we can do to improve without intruding unnecessarily. We do have to spy on Americans because anytime there's a spy ring against us, there's got to be an American at the bottom of it, somebody who has authorized access to the secrets and who's willing to give them away.

But we've got too many people who have that authorization today, 4.3 million in our government. Only 15 percent of

those, or 700,000, are at the very most sensitive categories of information. But that's far too many.

There's also far too much classified information. And we don't have enough people in the FBI and in the other agencies to do the checks on these people that should be done periodically, seeing if they have changed their behavior, if they've changed their outlook.

SAWYER: What should the government do now, Admiral?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think we should tighten up in all of these directions. I don't think we should panic and go into a Gestapo-type operation against our own citizens. But if you reduce the number of people cleared, reduce the amount of classified information that's around there, so people respect what is left, and do periodic surprise checks on people, including putting them occasionally on the lie detector, I think we can keep this under control.

But you have to remember that we're vulnerable because we're a free society.

SAWYER: Just a few seconds left, Admiral.

It's very interesting that the government has made much of these cases. Is that a sort of public relations ploy in order to get public backing of exactly what you're suggesting?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think it's partly that. But I think it's also that you just have to do this in order to get the people to court and to possibly get a conviction.

SAWYER: Admiral Stansfield Turner, former Director of the CIA, a CBS consultant.

Thank you for joining us this morning, sir.